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AUTHOR Bower, Ann M.
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ABSTRACT

A description is given of the Mentor Teacher-Internship Program, which is funded by New York State and operates under state guidance. The focus of the program is on building a mutually rewarding relationship between the mentor and novice teacher. Steps through which mentor-intern dyads can progress on their way toward an effective, optimal relationship are discussed. It is possible for these steps to lead to the transformation of both teachers with increased professional development for the mentor as well as a successful orientation for the intern. The more positive the relationship, the more likely it is that transformation of both teachers in a particular pair will take place. A salient feature of the program is regular released time for both individuals in the partnership. (JD)

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Doorway to Success in the New York State Mentor Teacher-Internship Program: The Relationship

by

Ann M. Bower

Syracuse University

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Syracuse University

Introduction

The New York State Mentor Teacher-Internship Program (MT-IP), now in its fourth year, came into being in response to the need for an effective strategy through which to cushion the transition of entering the teaching profession from school and/or other life experiences. A second objective of MT-IP has been to lower the attrition rate of competent, beginning teachers by encouraging them to stay in teaching careers. Two major, descriptive studies have been completed that assist in conceptualization of all of the parts of the State effort (Mager, Bower, Corwin, Davis, & DeBolt, 1987; Mager & Corwin, 1988).

Three Levels of MT-IP

The initial report to the State Education Department documents occurrences during the pilot year of the State Program (Mager, et al 1987). This descriptive study has been produced through the efforts of a five person team (one of them an author of this paper). In this particular study, an emphasis is placed on the necessity of understanding MT-IP on three levels or tiers. The first tier of understanding occurs at the state level. Here MT-IP has

"aspects of policy, funding, and state agency organization" (p.187). Specific, limited criteria established by the State must be followed as closely as possible. Perhaps the most significant criterion is that mentors and interns receive time in which they are released from classroom instruction. This released time is to be used to establish effective relationships. Funds are provided by the State which reimburses the schools for the amount of time the mentor teacher and the intern teacher is released from classroom instruction. The State funding is then used primarily for replacement teachers who provide instruction when the mentor teacher and intern teacher receive released time.

The project level of MT-IP is the second tier. Local educational agencies apply competitively for the project funding by indicating "the need for such a program, their management plan, budget, and procedures for evaluation" (Bower & Yarger, 1989, p. 61). After meeting the criteria necessary to receive funding, educational institutions are encouraged to design and submit for acceptance into this program varied models that suit the particular needs of their own urban, suburban, or rural districts.

Finally, and most importantly, the third tier of MT-IP, is the mentor-intern relationship, which is nested in each project within this program. This is the heart of MT-IP. The purpose of this paper is to provide the reader with the

realization of just how important the relationship is to the successful implementation of the mentoring of teachers. The presentation of a model that can lead to the development of optimal relationships is also offered for consideration.

Regarding Time and the Relationship

Because the New York mentoring program is committed to the idea that it takes time to develop and nurture mentor-intern relationships, school districts are required to provide released time for both mentor and intern teachers. At present there are experienced teachers serving in the role of mentor, both on a part-time and a full-time basis. Part-time mentors must be released ten percent of their classroom instruction time per intern and carry no less than a sixty percent teaching load. Full time mentors provide services to a minumum of five to a maximum of ten interns 100% of their classroom instructional time. Those mentors serving full time may do so no more than two out of five consecutive years.

As mentioned above, released time must also be given to interns. The beginning teachers have to be freed from twenty percent of their classroom instruction time in order to participate in the State program and development of a relationship with the mentor to whom each is matched.

The Third Level of MT-IP - The Relationship

In the present Empire State mentoring program, support for each new teacher, or intern, is provided by a highly thought of, more-experienced teacher, or mentor. The mentor teacher is formally matched with the intern teacher(s). The effort and reflection put forth in making potentially good matches, the manner in which the building principal and/or project coordinator introduces the program to the intern teachers (and other role players in the organization), and the provisions made for the required released time are but a few of the more significant variables that can impact on effective relationships (Bower and Yarger, 1989).

The relationship itself, however, is "the creation of two persons" and the responsibility for its ultimate success falls on persons in the mentor-intern dyad (Mager and Corwin, 1987). Through the establishment of productive relationships, it is believed that a number of difficulties of beginning teachers can be alleviated. The nature of various relationships is now under study. The literature that is emerging on this topic often discusses in-depth, single cases, not as model cases, but as cases which enable researchers to "examine the subjective dimensions of the behaviors of mentors and interns. Besides this, the cases enable researchers to learn much information about specific

problems particular to certain subjects and content areas" (Bower, 1989, p. 25).

Path to Effective Relationships

The author's work (Bower, 1989; Bower & Yarger, 1989) has attempted to expand the knowledge base about the intricacies of particular, formalized mentor-intern relationships. As specific relationships have unfolded, it has appeared that the different "paths" leading to making them as effective as possible might be made smoother. Obstacles might be cleared from each and every "path" as it winds its way towards a unique "staircase" on which the two sojourners "climb," moving towards a potentially optimal relationship. For example, matching the intern teacher to a mentor teacher in the same grade or subject area will greatly facilitate the interns' willingness to spend time with the mentor teacher. On the other hand, the failure to recognize the necessity for common time periods in which each teacher in a dyad is freed from a percentage of his/her teaching load is a major stumbling block on the "path" to an effective relationship.

Stages in an optimal relationship. The more productive, formalized mentor teacher-intern teacher relationship can, and hopefully will, lead to a positive transformation of both participants personally and

professionally. Five stages are put forward for consideration in the Bower model of the development of an optimal mentor-intern relationship (See Figure 1).

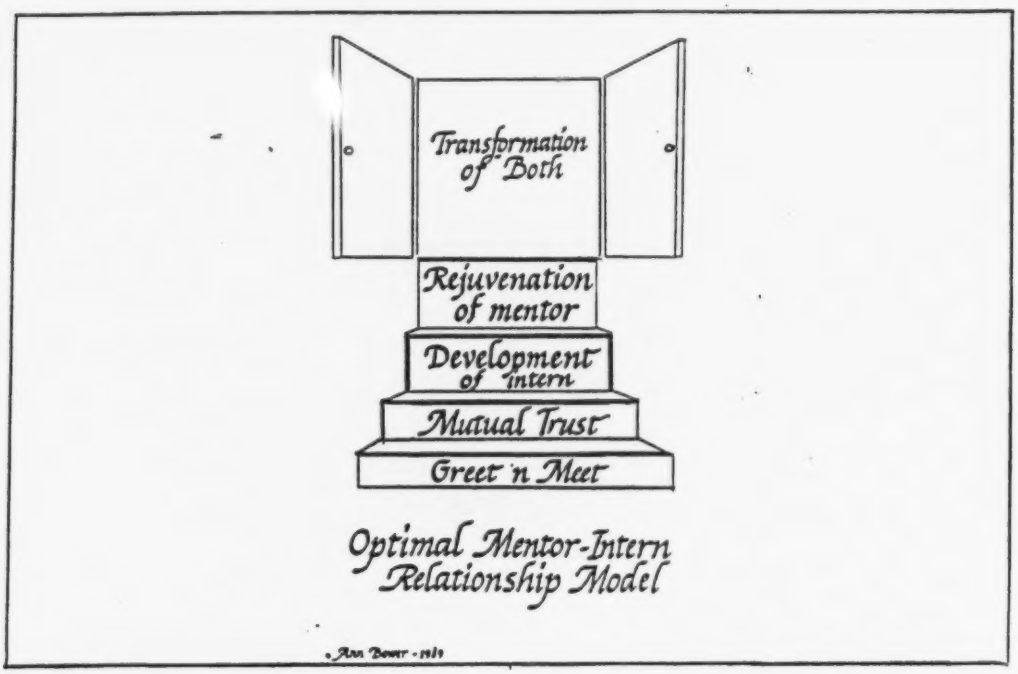

Figure 1 - Optimal Mentor-Intern Relationship Model

The beginning stage in the author's model for optimizing relationships is called the "Greet and Meet" stage. It is meant to emphasize the importance of the time and place of the initial meeting. Starting a relationship early in the school year creates an opportunity for getting a relationship off on the right foot. There is less chance for resentment to build in the intern because the mentor wasn't there when needed most. Of course, a relationship does not <u>have</u> to begin before or during the first week of school in order to be perceived by the participants as

highly successful. Facilitation of an early, first meeting, however, can serve as one indication of the value a district places on the establishment of optimal relationships. In addition, the environment in which the initial meeting takes place can impact on the start of a relationship. For example, a highly structured meeting in unfamiliar surroundings, such as the district office, may serve to increase the discomfort level, cause apprehension and a reluctance to trust on the part of the intern.

In order to bring about consolidation of a relationship, the second "step" or stage of this model, "Mutual trust," should be next established. Mentor teachers do not evaluate intern teachers in the New York State Mentor Teacher-Internship Program in order to facilitate the attainment of trust. Trust is often not possible, or at least difficult, when one is being judged or evaluated. Confidentiality between the mentor teacher and the intern teacher helps trust to grow.

The intern teacher also needs to understand what is expected of him/her in the relationship and in the building of mutual trust. In fact, the more people in the organization that understand this trust building facet of a mentoring relationship, the greater the chance of a successful relationship occurring.

The largest "step" or stage in the creation of an optimal mentor-intern relationship is the personal and professional development of the intern. It is possible for an intern teacher to gain considerable professional experience in one year through an effective relationship with a mentor teacher. Furthermore, the mentor teacher can act as a "sounding board" through which an intern can work through his/her personal concerns, such as locating a place to live, coping with a family illness, finding a suitable babysitter, and so on.

Since persons and situations are not constant in mentoring relationships, no "recipe" can be offered, nor can one method be designed to bring about development of an intern's full potential. Even though formulas do not apply in the creation of positive mentoring relationships, a mentor might be wise to begin the association by encouraging the intern to identify areas in which he/she might like assistance. Next, the mentor teacher could look for ways to further motivate a novice to identify a less strong area(s) to work on as their bond of trust grows stronger.

The final "step" or stage in the Bower model (before the "doorway" that leads to the transformation of both teachers) occurs when the mentor teacher experiences rejuvenation. This interesting phenomenon is beginning to be noted more and more in the "mentoring in teaching" literature (Thies-Sprinthall, 1986; Mager & Corwin, 1988).

Although mentor teachers speak about how time consuming acting as mentors actually is, a considerable number were, never-the-less, revitalized personally and professionally. Regeneration of the mentor teacher seems to occur for a myriad of reasons, among them:

1. The mentor is affirmed as a person who has and can contribute to the teaching profession.

2. The mentor teacher arrives at the realization that it is possible to have an effect on, not only the intern(s), but, through them, two or three times (perhaps more) as many students as he/she has been able to teach/influence previously.

3. The mentor teacher is at a stage in life where he/she feels the need to help others in the profession. This need is now being satisfied.

4. The mentor teacher has been forced to re-analyze his/her own teaching because of some self-selected need or the project's requirements, such as co-observations, peer coaching, new strategies of teaching and so on.

No guarantee can be given, of course, that positive transformation of both individuals in the dyad will occur if/ when all stages in the Bower model take place. This

model simply suggests that the careful "climbing" of these "steps" can lead to an optimal relationship, which, in turn, can lead to the transformation of the more-experienced and less-experienced teacher in a dyad.

Effective mentoring relationships can begin with the mentor teacher offering substantially more to the intern teacher than he/she receives back. During the length of time the relationships are formalized (typically one school year), they can become optimal relationships. When the relationships are optimized, both persons are likely to become substantial givers and receivers.

Conclusion

This paper has briefly described some of the salient points of MT-IP in New York State. It has emphasized that the relationship is at the core of this Program. "Steps" through which mentor-intern dyads can progress on their way toward an effective, perhaps, optimal relationship have been proposed. It is possible for these "steps" to lead to the transformation of both teachers in particular mentor-intern pairs. The more positive the relationship, the more likely it is that transformation of both the more-experienced and less-experienced teacher in a specific pair will take place. Benefits to the mentor teacher and the intern teacher have also been noted.

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